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UP THE SKEENA RIVER TO THE HOME OF THE
TSIMSHIANS.*BY GEORGE A. DORSEY, PH. D.,
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IN a recent number of the *Monthly* I described some of the incidents of a visit to the Haida and Tlingit villages about Dixon's Entrance; now I am to speak of the Tsimshian villages on the Skeena River. The Tsimshian Indians are one of the five great stocks which make up the aboriginal population of the coast of British Columbia and southern Alaska. They are shut in by the Tlingits on the north and by the Kwakiutls on the south, while on the head waters of the Nass and Skeena Rivers they come in contact with the great Tinneh or Athabascan stock. The Tsimshians are probably the most progressive of all the coast Indians, and are one of a few stocks on the American continent which are holding their own in point of numbers.

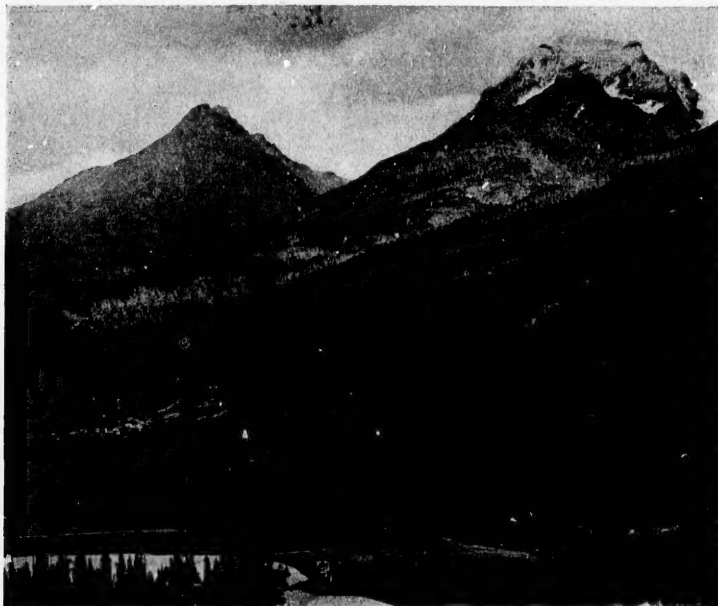
Desiring to visit those villages which are least contaminated by modern influence, we ascended the Skeena River to the village of Kitanmaksh or Hazelton. The Skeena is the historic river of British Columbia; its name signifies the "Water of Terrors." Nearly every rock, every bend, every cañon is the scene of some mythical tale. The scene of the birth of the Tsimshian nation lies in its valley; the rock is still revered upon which rested the Tsimshian ark after the flood, and the "Dum-lak-an," "the new home and place of dispersal," is still a Mecca to which pilgrimages are made. In the modern development of the Omenica and Cariboo gold fields the Skeena has been the highway to the sea. For hundreds of years canoes have been paddled up and down its waters; it has been the highway for intertribal trade from time immemorial, and when the Hudson Bay Company's post was established at Hazelton, and merchandise began to pour into the upper country in a steady stream, the Tsimshians with their canoes enjoyed for a long time a monopoly of the carrying trade. Gradually, as they learned the ways and methods of the white man, the price per ton of freight from the coast to Hazelton began steadily to rise, until in 1891 the tariff of sixty dollars a ton was declared ruinous by the company, and they decided to build their own steamer with which to carry their freight up the river.

Port Essington is the chief port of the mouth of the Skeena, and in Essington we found ourselves on the twenty-third day of July. The *Caledonia* was up the river on her third trip, but was expected back any hour, but so delightfully uncertain is the river

* From a lecture delivered at the Field Columbian Museum, November 13, 1897.

voyage that, as we were informed, "there was no telling when she would be down—in fact, she might be caught above the cañon and wouldn't be down for weeks."

The town of Essington dates back to 1835, when the Hudson Bay Company established a post there. Its only rival for pre-eminence on the coast is Port Simpson. The town in summer is completely given over to fishing, the salmon cannery of Cunningham & Son being one of the largest on the coast, and the river for twenty miles is dotted with canneries. In one day, while we were



VIEW ON THE UPPER SKEENA RIVER; PEAK OF THE "FIVE VIRGINS" MOUNTAIN.

in Essington, the catch of salmon on the river was ninety-two thousand fish. In addition to the cannery the town boasts of a good hotel and a Salvation Army. An Indian Salvation Army is worth going miles to see, for the Indian is a natural-born salvationist; the army permits him to make all the noise he chooses, sing as loudly as he pleases, and, best of all, he is entitled to make a speech every time it comes his turn.

In the afternoon, about four o'clock, on the day after our arrival, a long, shrill blast of the whistle aroused the entire town, for the Caledonia was in sight. Down we went to the wharf, and the entire town followed. What a motley crowd you will find on one of these

British Columbia wharves! What coloring, what a Babel of tongues—Tlingits from Alaska, Haidas from the Queen Charlotte Islands, Tsimshians from the Skeena, Kwakiutls from Vancouver, Chinamen, Japanese, Greeks, Scandinavians, Englishmen, and Yankees; men, women, children, dogs, and from two to six woolly bear cubs. The *Caledonia* is the exclusive property of the Hudson Bay Company; she is not a common carrier, and does not encourage either passengers or freight, as the tariff rates prove. There is a feverish haste and hustle about the movements of the steamer which are fairly contagious. She makes her first trip early in the spring, as soon as the ice has left the rivers, on the Stickene; then it is a wild, eager ambition of the company to have her make four trips up the Skeena before the river closes up in the fall.

We had as passengers two prospectors from Spokane, a mining expert from Victoria, a native evangelist from Essington, and about fifty Indians, mostly women and children, each one with a varied assortment of boxes, bales, bundles, and dogs; the crew numbered twenty, and we had about one hundred tons of freight on board.

From Essington to Hazelton is one hundred and fifty-two miles, a panorama of unending and unbroken beauty; never monotonous, always interesting, it presents a river voyage which is probably not equaled, certainly not excelled, by any other river voyage of the same length on the American continent or in the world. We began the voyage on Sunday morning, we tied up in front of Hazelton on Saturday night. To recount in detail the haps and mishaps of each day's progress would take more time than I can command. In one day we made forty-eight miles, on another day we made one hundred yards, on another day we didn't make a foot. With plenty of water under her keel the *Caledonia* could run twenty miles an hour; she could cut her way through a sand bar at the rate of a yard or so an hour; and at either rate of progress she burned each hour from one and a half to two cords of wood.

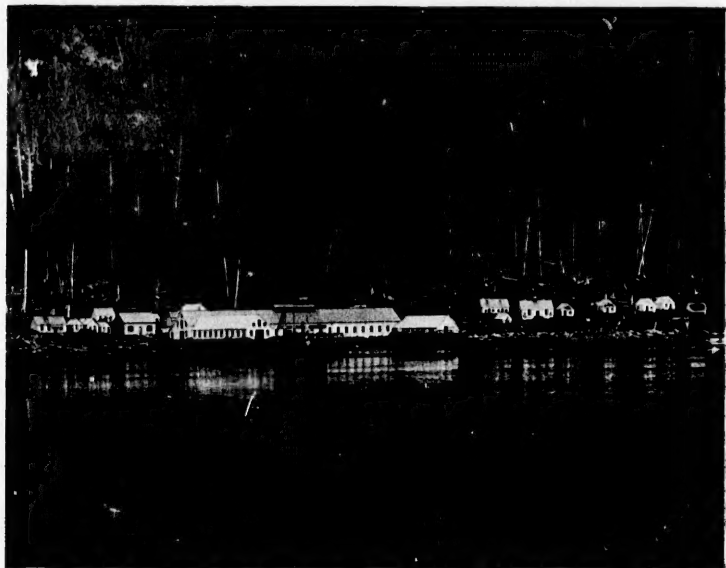
For the first ten miles the scenery does not differ materially from that which we are accustomed to in the inland sea from Victoria to Alaska. Then we enter fresh water and for the next forty miles steam through one long mountain gorge, for here the river has cut completely through the Cascade Range. The mountains begin at the water's edge and rise almost perpendicularly to heights of from three to four thousand feet. Their lower limits are covered with dense green forests, which seem to grow out of the solid rock. The summits are smooth and glistening, and often covered with snow and ice. Here and there we can trace some tiny rivulet issuing from an ice bed high up among the clouds, and every portion of its course can be traced down the steep mountain wall until it gives one final and

headlong plunge into the river. At times these streams, taking their rise in some extensive glacier, are of considerable magnitude, and fairly roar as they leap and hurl themselves downward from their dizzy height. And here we learned a curious fact about the river: in summer it falls when it rains, and rises when the sun shines, so rapidly do the pent-up snows of winter disappear and rush down the mountain sides under the heat of the spring sun.

Until noon of the second day we had been making good time, but now the fun began, for we had left deep water and had arrived at the first flight of the eight-hundred-foot stairway which the Caledonia had to climb ere Hazelton could be reached. The river had been gradually widening as one island after another had been passed, until now it was nearly half a mile wide and flowed through four channels. The captain attempted one channel, but we couldn't gain an inch, and in drifting back again down the rapids the current carried the boat against the rocks and, with a crash and a lurch, but minus some woodwork, she was in the stream again. Then two other channels were tried, but without avail, although the wheel was throwing water and gravel over the pilot house. The fourth channel was next tried, but the current was too strong. Then we "lined her out," and this novel method of getting a huge steamboat up a stream soon became only too commonplace. The method of procedure is this: The boat is forced against a sand bar and allowed to rest while men go forward in a skiff with a long four-inch cable, which is made fast to a tree on the bank or to a "dead man," a long spar buried deep in the earth of a sand bar and heaped over with bowlders. When all is ready, the boat is attached to the capstan and the wheel begins to revolve. It is tedious work and often provoking, as when the cable parts, or the "dead man" gives up his hold, and the whole work must be done over again. The boat quivers from stem to stern, and the wheel, with all possible steam on, is simply one revolving ball of water. We fairly hold our breath as we listen to the dull vibration of the boat, the rumbling of the capstan, and the grating sound of the keel of the steamer as she is being dragged through the rapids over the bar; but above all can be heard the voice of Captain Bonser as he shouts to his Indian pilot, "Go 'head capstan," "Stop steamboat," "Stop capstan," "Go 'head steamboat," "Go 'head capstan!" In four hours we have made about fifty yards, but we are in open water again and the boat settles down to its regular chug, chug, chug.

Eighty miles from Essington the Skeena in its flight to the sea makes its first plunge into the Cascade Mountains, and its entrance is indescribably grand. No pen or brush can do justice to the beauties of the Kitselas Cañon. At its mouth we are in a broad,

deep basin, as if the river had felt depressed as it passed through the quarter-mile narrow gorge and had here spread itself out to breathe and rest before it started anew its downward journey to the sea. It was late in the afternoon, and the western sun threw long shadows of the lofty sky-crowned perpendicular walls of the left-hand side of the cañon over against the rocky islets and ragged, rock-bound eastern shore. Once we have entered, there is no faltering; "lining it out" is impossible here, and on and on the boat labors



A SKEENA RIVER SALMON CANNERY.

and climbs, twisting and turning through the narrow, tortuous channel. A quick eye and a steady nerve must command the wheel now, for a turn too much or too little would be fatal. One instinctively feels that the "Water of Terrors" is the proper name for this river, and with that feeling comes the other—that it was never intended for navigation.

After four days' grinding over sand bars and pounding against rocks we tie up for repairs. One of the boilers had sprung a leak which could be neglected no longer. The delay of thirty-six hours was not without compensation, for the country about was open, and proved a relief after the long ride through the high-walled river from the sea to the cañon. The banks were low or moderately high and of gravel or sand bluffs, and we could look off over a landscape

broken here and there by solitary peaks or clustered mountains, their summits always covered with ice and snow. To the far east were the pure white peaks of the Five Virgins, their summits glistening under the bright sun. Even the character of the vegetation had changed, and the dense forests of somber firs, spruces, and cedars of the lower river had given way to great cottonwoods and underbrush of hazel and alder.

In the afternoon we climbed a bluff near the river, from which we could look off over a country that was wild and extremely picturesque. To one side of us could be seen a great mountain, its summit covered by a mighty glacier whose blue-white ice gleamed and glistened in the sun. And there was no mistaking the power of the sun that day; its warm rays being especially welcome after some weeks of the cold, depressing gloom and fog of the coast.

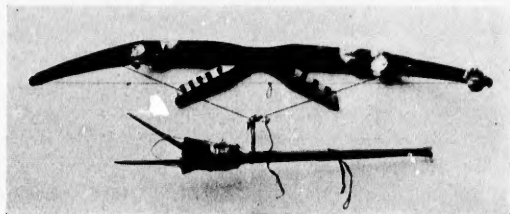
We were now really in the country of the Tsimshians, and every few hours we drew up in front of some quiet, peaceful village, its almost deserted cottages guarded by the totem poles of former days. In succession we pass Meamskinesht, Kitwangah, and Kitzegukla, with now and then a small salmon-fishing station. The villages proved disappointing both in their smallness and modernness, and none of them seemed worthy of any extended visit. From time to time we passed great black patches in the forest, the result of extensive fires, sure signs that the rainy coast was far away.

On Friday night we tied up to the bank within five miles of our destination, but we had yet to pass Macintosh's Bar. That was accomplished on the following day, after eleven hours' hard work, and by five o'clock we had reached "The Forks," or the junction of the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers. Our course was to the left, up the Skeena for half a mile, and in a few moments more we tied up in front of the stockaded post of the Hudson Bay Company; we had reached Hazelton. The region about us was "Dum-lak-an," "what will be a good place," the home of the Tsimshians.

Before 1870 the town was farther down the river, on the flat at the junction of the Bulkley and Skeena Rivers. It has had additions to its population from Kis-pi-yeoux, and from villages down the river. There are also to be numbered among the inhabitants the Indian agent, Mr. Loring, the Hudson Bay representative, Mr. Sargent, and his assistants, and Mr. Fields, the missionary. The Indian population numbers about two hundred and seventy-five. The town occupies a low, uneven plain, which, beginning at the water's edge, extends back for a quarter of a mile, where it is hemmed in by a high bluff on the face of the second river terrace. There are but few of the old houses left and still fewer totem poles, and they are without particular interest. Most prominent in the village is the warlike

stockade of the company's post, with its two bastions at opposite corners, and the blockhouse in the center of the inclosure, but now hidden by the store which stands in front of it. The stockade was put up in 1891, when an Indian uprising was feared throughout the length of the river.

Wherever you find a trading post and a missionary you can not hope to find people who retain much of their native life or who are of great value to anthropology. But still Hazelton was sufficiently primitive to be of interest in many respects. In matters of dress the Indians are almost on a footing with the whites, but they still make a curious garment for winter's use which is worn by nearly all of the interior tribes. This is a blanket made out of long, narrow strips of rabbit hide, and is warm, heavy, and extremely durable. We were fortunate enough to find a woman who was engaged in



TSIMSHIAN SHAMAN'S CEREMONIAL BOW AND ARROW.

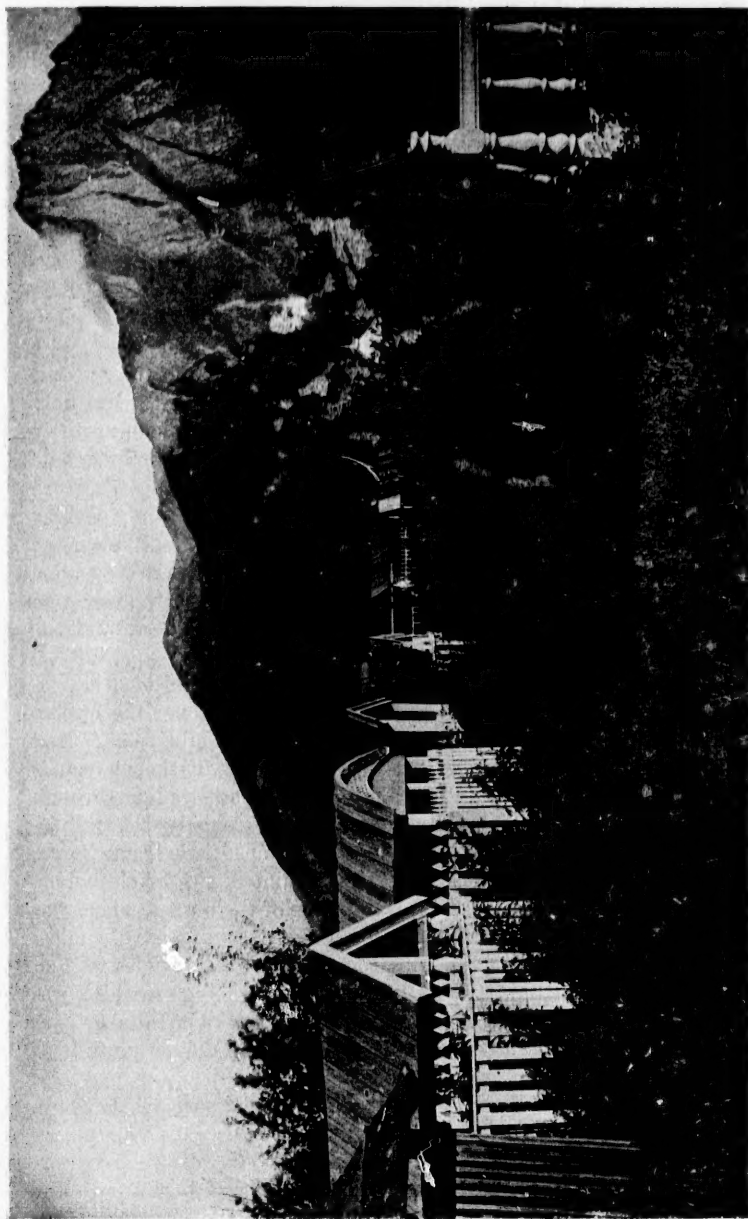
making one of these curious garments on a most rude and primitive loom. Other garments are still occasionally made of Indian hemp, which grows wild and in abundance. This is beaten and pounded and then spun into fine thread, and woven into the desired form.

In former days the Indians used large quantities of the wool of the mountain sheep in making the beautiful *chilcat* blankets that formed an important part of the chief's costume, but now the Indians buy most of their wool. Its chief uses are for sashes and belts, which are still worn and made after the fashion of former days. Of other garments of daily use, except mocassins, there is nothing remaining. There are a few remnants of ceremonial costumes still in existence, and by a bit of good fortune we were enabled to secure the complete paraphernalia of a shaman, or Indian doctor, who had only recently renounced his native practices and joined Mr. Fields's band of Christians. In the outfit thus acquired were rattles, charms, blankets, masks, and headdresses of various kinds. From another individual we secured the complete costume of a member of the fraternity, or secret society, of Dog Eaters. The Tsimshians have four such societies, and the Dog Eaters stand third in rank, being surpassed only by the Man Eaters

or Cannibal Society. The chief object of this outfit, apart from the white and red cedar bark rings, was a long club, one side of which was ornamented by a fringe of red cedar tassels. Of interest also was the curious cap made of plaited bands of red cedar bark, and so ornamented as to represent the head of the owl. Another object secured from a shaman was a peculiar bow and arrow. These were purely ceremonials, and were only used in the dances of the secret societies. By an ingenious device the point of the arrow could be opened out, and in this position represented the open jaws of a serpent. On the bow were two fins, that could be lowered or raised at will by means of cords, which represented the fin-back whale. The bow itself is of light soft wood, and is bent by means of a string passing around the operator's body, the two ends of the bow being fastened to the body of the bow by leather hinges.

In all the ceremonies, both religious and civil, an important part of the costume is the mask. These are generally of wood, and portray all manner of real and fanciful personages. Some of them are wonders of ingenuity, being so constructed that the eyes, mouth, and often the ears can be moved at the will of the wearer. Some of them are even double, and so arranged that by drawing open the outer mask, an inner one of an entirely different character can be revealed. One of the rarest masks which was ever brought out of the Tsimshian country is one in the possession of the museum, which was acquired some time ago. It is of bone and finely carved, while the teeth and tusks are those of animals.

Hazelton is of much interest to the observer of the human countenance, for, while the residents of the town are Tsimshians, there is a village near by on the Bulkley River, the people of which belong to the great Tinnah or Athabascan stock, which extends from the Arctic Circle on the north to the Territories of Arizona and New Mexico on the south, where it is represented by the Apaches. In some respects the differences between the Tsimshians and Tinnahs, or Howgelgait, as this branch is called, are quite marked, and these differences stand out in greater relief because more or less of the population of Howgelgait spend a part of their time in Hazelton, and so one sees representatives of the two stocks in close contact. The Tsimshians, like the Haidas, are great canoe people, and are rather short-legged, with great development of the chest and shoulders. Like the Haidas, also, they have strong, long arms, which bespeak familiarity with the paddle. The Howgelgait, on the other hand, are a pure mountaineer people, and are tall, robust, and finely proportioned. Their hair is black, coarse, and abundant. The eyebrows are thick and remarkably wide at the outer side. This same peculiarity may be observed in the masks of this tribe. The beard is sparse, but it must



A STREET IN THE Tsimshian CEMETERY AT HAZELTON, B. C.

be remembered that the hair is generally pulled out as it appears, particularly on the cheeks, while the mustache and the chin tuft are allowed to grow. Among the Tsimshians the face is wide and the cheek bones are prominent. The nose is narrow, with a depressed root. Neither the Tsimshians nor Tinneh practice artificial deformation of the head. With the Tinneh, or more exactly the Howgelgaites, the forehead is broad and less receding than is usual with the American aborigines. The face is full and broad and the cheek bones prominent, but the nose, unlike that of the Tsimshians, is well formed and generally aquiline, although occasionally it is thick and flat-tish. Their lips are also thick and the chin is more prominent than is usual among the Tsimshians. The eyes are large and of a deep black color; the jaws are generally very heavy and massive.

Of traces of the ancient prevalent fashion in deformity we saw very little. One old woman still retained the labret, but it was only a shadow of the former labrets in size. Although the long, finely polished bone ornament which the men formerly wore in a hole through the septum of the nose has entirely disappeared, we saw a few old men in whom the pierced septum was still plainly visible. With the Howgelgaites it was formerly the custom to load down the ears with highly polished bits of abalone shells, which were suspended by means of brass rings inserted into holes one above the other on the outer margin of the ear, extending from the lobe around the entire helix.

Hazelton's "City of the Dead" stands on a high bluff overlooking the town and valley, and commands a view off over the broken forest-clad country which is as beautiful as well could be. A trail winds along the face of the bluff until the crest of the plateau is reached, where it divides into a right and left path leading through the main street of the silent city. The sight is strangely odd and picturesque. Over each grave has been erected a neat little frame house, often of considerable dimensions. All are painted with bright colors, and the effect is decidedly "mixed." In one of the houses, which was substantially built and neatly carpeted, I saw through a glass window two chairs, a washstand with full assortment of toilet articles, and an umbrella, while at the rear of the house stood a table on which was spread a neat cloth, and on the table was a lamp. On the floor was a new pair of shoes. Over the table hung a large crayon portrait of the departed occupant of the grave beneath.

In another house I saw chests of clothing, and suspended from a cord were garments of various kinds, including a complete costume of the fraternity of the Dog Eaters. These five-foot-deep graves covered by little houses are not the usual manner of burial with the Tsimshians, for until within a very few years the dead were cre-

mated. Even to-day in the neighboring village of Kispiyeoux the dead are buried in shallow graves just in front of the house.

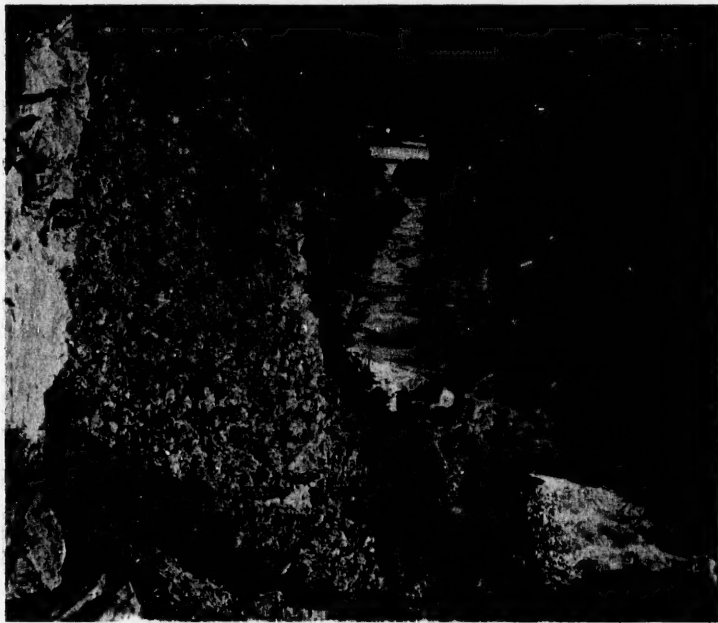
Of the many charming spots about Hazelton which are well worthy of a visit, we had time for only one—a horseback ride to the Howgelgait Cañon. The ride was most enjoyable in every respect. The road leads from the town up over the plateau through the burying ground, and then on through a partly cleared forest of cottonwoods and maples. Then we plunge into a two-mile-long lane, the trail scarcely wide enough to admit of the passing of a horse, through a dense grove of hazel bushes, laden to their tips with unripe nuts still protected by their green fuzzy envelopes; and now we knew whence came the name "Hazelton." Suddenly the grove terminates, and after dismounting and walking forward a few steps we came to the face of the cañon. What a sight! On the opposite cliff, but on a higher level, stands the old deserted village of Howgelgait, with its great empty houses and skeleton totem poles. At our feet, down a sheer precipice almost a thousand feet below, the Bulkley River, set on edge, rushes and roars and foams through the rocky gorge to join the Skeena a mile away. Just by the mouth of the cañon, at the edge of the great whirlpool, and on a gravelly beach, stands the present town of Howgelgait. Hearing shouts, we looked closer, and far down we saw men moving about, their forms dwarfed to almost spiderlike dimensions. They were building a swinging bridge over the river, and the timbers already in place looked like the meshes of a spider's web.

Looking up the cañon, we could see from the opposite wall near the water's edge, and far below us, a rude scaffolding suspended by bark ropes over the river, and from this Indians were lowering their nets and drawing up salmon. One man after another would leave for his home, his back bending under the weight of many fish, his place to be taken by another, who begins casting his nets. And so these rude scaffoldings here and all along the rivers are occupied by busy fishermen throughout the summer, for salmon is chief of the winter's food supply of these people. In one house we saw over a thousand salmon hung up to dry for use during the winter months.

We left the cañon for the ride back to Hazelton with keen regret, for no more fascinating spot did we find on our entire journey than right here. On the way we encountered a woman of the Carrier tribe of the Tinnehs from Frazer's Lake, who was returning from Hazelton laden with provisions and cheap calicoes.

We had scarcely entered Hazelton when the tinkling of the bell of the "lead horse" announced the arrival of the pack train. Second only in importance to the arrival of the Caledonia to the people of Hazelton is the arrival of the pack train, for it brings the

news of the far interior. But of much greater importance and value is the cargo of furs which are brought out on every trip in exchange for supplies which are taken in. On that day there were fifty-seven mules, each laden with two bales of furs weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, and including beaver, mink, otter, sable, and bear, all destined for the Hudson Bay Company's house in London, there to



HAGIVILGAIT CAÑON, WITH INDIAN FISH WEIRS AT BOTTOM.

be auctioned off in lots to the highest bidder, and then to be distributed to all parts of the civilized world.

Within less than an hour's time the precious furs were aboard, and we bade farewell to Hazelton. The *Caledonia* drops back, is slowly turned around by the current, and with its steady chug, chug, we began our journey down the river, the power of the boat aided by the swiftly flowing water carrying us along at a rapid rate. If the slow, labored up journey was a revelation with its worries and anxieties, what can be said of the down journey with its kaleidoscope panorama of sand bars, Indian villages, far-away snowy mountains, dense forests of mighty cottonwoods, lofty heights which tower above us clad to their very summits with eternal green, mountain streams, and innumerable waterfalls and cascades! And what shall one say

of that memorable ride through the cañon, the wheel reversed and throwing water over the pilot house, the boat rocking and swaying to and fro! Before we were fairly aware of the fact we were out into that great, deep, silent basin again and off on the home stretch. Apart from taking on wood and stopping at one or two Indian villages, a delay of a few hours was made to permit some mining engineers to examine a mine. They had just come up from the coast and brought with them news of the gold excitement in the Yukon Valley, and now for the first time we heard that magic word "Klondike," which was soon to "electrify the world and put the gold fields of California, South Africa, and Australia to shame."

At nine o'clock we were in Essington once more. "Klondike, Klondike!" on every side. The whole country seemed to have gone daft. One steamer after another went racing by the mouth of the Skeena on the way to Dyea and the Skagway Trail. But our fortunes lay in the other direction, and that night we were aboard the Islander, bound for Victoria and the south.